

AVEBURY PARK HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION & ASSESSMENT



Prepared by:
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Status: Final

1. Summary description

Property:	Avebury Park
Historically known as:	Flesher Reserve
Controlling Local Body:	Christchurch City Council
Physical Address of Site:	9 Eveleyn Couzins Ave, Avonside
Landscape Description:	Public Reserve
Landscape Typology:	Suburban Park
Legal Description:	Reserve 4836, DP 14735; Lot 153, DP 14735; Reserve 4837, DP 14735
Land Area:	8,012 square metres
Summary History of Land Ownership and Management:	Private ownership to 1945 Crown ownership 1945-51 Passed to Council 1951
NZHP Act 1993:	Not registered
Heritage Buildings / Structures in District Plan:	Not listed
Archaeological Site:	It is a landscape associated with pre-1900 human activity which means that the site is protected under the archaeological provisions of the Historic Places Act.
Planning Map ref:	40
Notable Trees:	No notable trees scheduled in Appendix 4 of Christchurch City Operative District Plan (updated 2010).
Other:	None listed on RNZIH notable tree schedule
Zoning:	Conservation 2 (Historic and Garden City Parks)



Figure 1. Avebury Park
Source: Google Earth 2010

2. Background

2.1 Purpose

This report has been prepared for David Sissons, Senior Parks Planner, Network Planning Team Greenspace, Christchurch City Council.

This report has been prepared on the understanding that this Historical Investigation of Avebury Park and the identification of the heritage values of the place, its fabric and character is required for Management Planning purposes.

2.2 Approach

The preparation of this report follows the accepted practice for heritage landscape investigation and assessment and draws on the internationally recognised Semple-Kerr methodology for *The Preparation of Conservation Plans for Places of European Cultural Significance* (2005) where relevant.

This has included:

1. an investigation of the landscape from its inception to the present involving:
 - tracing the evolution of the place in context using primary documents, photographic data, historic land maps and titles
 - an examination of the biographies of the individuals associated with the development of the place
 - an investigation of the wider social context surrounding the development of the grounds
2. a brief physical survey of the grounds including the identification of any significant extant site fabric

2.3 Scope and limitations

2.3.1 Site Mapping

Full vegetation mapping was outside of the scope of this report.

2.4 Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments are due to those who supplied historical information, time, resources and other forms of assistance in respect of this research.

Amanda Ohs, Urban Design and Heritage Team, Christchurch City Council

Jocelyn Mahoney, Landscape Architect, City Design, Capital Programme Group

3. History

3.1 Chronological summary of events

Era	Event	Source
1871	William Flesher purchases 25 acres of Rural Section 197.	Background information for Listed Heritage Place: Avebury House, Heritage files, CCC
ca. 1885	Avebury House built.	ibid
1889	James Flesher inherits the Avebury property.	ibid
1930	Hubert Flesher inherits the Avebury property.	ibid
1945	Hubert sells Avebury house and 10 acres of the grounds to the Crown.	ibid
1946	25 June. Plan for the Flesher's Park (Avebury park) drawn by Edgar Taylor.	Plan Reference DSU: L198, dated 25/6/1946 recorded in List of Plans drawn by Edgar Taylor, 1992
1948	Avebury is one of nine parks given their official names by the City Council in 1948.	Press 14/9/1948, P. 6
1951	The house and approximately 8 acres formally passed to Council.	Memorandum of Transfer 492/280, dated 18 July 1951
1950	October. Building altered to accommodate district plunket rooms and for gardener's accommodation.	Reserves Department Report month ending 30/10/1950, CH335 Box 33/4, CCCA
1950	October. Trees and shrubs planted and lawn sown.	ibid
1952	Perspective and Construction Drawings prepared for children's paddling pool by Edgar Taylor	Plan reference DSU: L1988, dated 30/9/1952 recorded in List of Plans drawn by Edgar Taylor, 1992
1954	Paddling pool constructed at the rear of the house and play equipment added.	Heritage files: Avebury House, CCC
1960	Property leased to the Youth Hostel Association for 5 years.	Background information for Listed Heritage Place: Avebury House, Heritage files, CCC
c.1963	East Christchurch Racing Pigeon Club have a presence in the grounds.	Meeting notes - Richmond Pigeon Club / J. Walton, 17/6/2008, CCC
1966	House officially opens as a Youth Hostel and is renamed Cora Wilding Youth Hostel. Gardeners still in residence.	Sargison, Patricia A. 'Wilding, Cora Hilda Blanche 1888 - 1982'. <i>Dictionary of New Zealand Biography</i> , 2007
1969	"Avebury's greatest glory now lies in its wide smooth lawns and fine trees."	Press, 26/7/1969
ca. 1980s	Survey of grounds undertaken.	Property report of Avebury Park
2001	Pergola noted on site.	Photographs, CCC

Era	Event	Source
2001-2002	Conservation of house.	Pegasus Post, 18/8/2002, P. 1
2002	September. Avebury House officially opened in 2002 by Prime Minister Helen Clark and serves as the Avebury House Community Centre.	Richmond Community News, December 2002/03

Abbreviations

ANZ – Archives New Zealand

ATL – Alexander Turnbull Library

CCCA – Christchurch City Council Archives

CMDRC – Canterbury Museum Documentary Research Centre

3.2 History

Council files documenting the early history of Averbury House note that William Flesher purchased the land now known as Averbury Park in 1871. Originally part of Dr John Seager Gundry's Rural Section 197, the greater site was named Avebury Farm by Grundy after his home in West England.

In 1885 the Fleshers acquired 25 acres of Averbury Farm which was mainly swampy land and built their home around an earlier building, on an elevated part of the lot. It is unclear whether this earlier building was Dr Gundry's cottage, which is understood to have been erected by him but never occupied by him, or a previous home constructed by the Fleschers.¹

The Fleshers were a large family and marriage and funeral notices confirm that there were at least five daughters and two sons. One son, Alfred died at Avebury in 1885, aged 22. This was followed by the death of his 28 year old sister Lucy at Averbury in 1896 and then Bertha aged 23 in 1898, again at Avebury. It is possible that trees were planted in the grounds of the property to mark these events.

Avebury was used as the venue for a number of social occasions in the 1880s and 1890s and was a popular location for 'annual treats' and New Years Day celebrations for the Richmond Methodist Sabath School. The earliest of these was held in the Flesher's cow paddock immediately in front of the house.² From the 1890s fund raising Garden Parties and Circuit parties were held in the grounds for the United Methodist Free Church.³ William was one of the founders of Free Methodism in New Zealand and his wife and son James were also members.

Photographs which document these garden events and other family occasions between 1880 and the early 1920s show that the property was fashionably laid out with a wide Carriage Drive which extended the length of what is now Eveleyn Couzins Avenue to North Avon Road. Avenue plantings of Limes lined both sides of the drive as far as the front gate and a thick shrubbery edged the drive closer to the house. The stables and carriage house were located to the rear of the property together with large vegetable and fruit grounds. The front garden and public access to the house was well separated from the more functional areas of the property by high hedges (*Macrocarpa*?) and vegetation was kept low around the front of the house. (Refer figure 2.)

A shrubbery, summer house, tennis court and series of rock retained terraces were all features of the grounds although it is difficult to determine where these were located in relation to the house. A series of ornate rustic-fashioned manuka (?) arches, screens and fencing were originally associated with a vegetable garden in the 1880s⁴ but by the 1920s their function appears to have changed and they became important elements in an elaborate ornamental garden, parts of which may have been a picking garden. (Refer figures 3-5.)

A large portion of the property was taken up with an orchard which was located to the rear of the property and a vegetable garden which by 1907/08 was probably on the eastern side of the house, in much the same location as it is today.

1 Background information for Listed Heritage Place: Averbury House, Heritage files, CCC

2 Richmond Methodist 1969 Centennial Pamphlet

3 *Star* 31 December 1881 P. 3; *Star*, 31 December 1883, P. 2, *Star* 4 March 1895, P. 4

4 Based on annotations on a copy of image in an undated property report



Figure 2. Avebury, December 16 1907
Source: CCC Heritage Files



Figure 3. Summerhouse, rustic manuka fence and possibly a picking garden.
Source: CCC Heritage Files

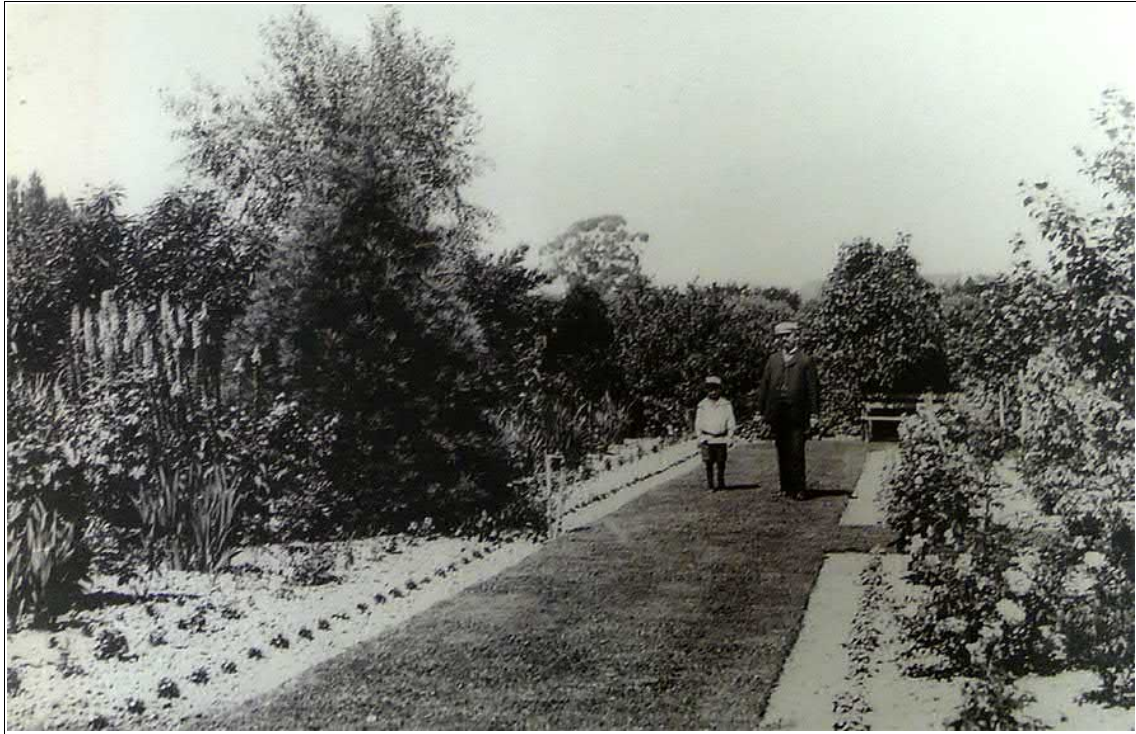


Figure 4. Top lawn looking east 1907-1908
Source: CCC Heritage Files



Figure 5. Hubert Flesher ca.1915 standing by extant gate.
Source: CCC Heritage Files

In 1930, coinciding with the time Hubert Flesher inherited Avebury from his father, part of the grounds were subdivided ⁵. Fifteen years later Hubert sold the house and a little over 10 acres of land to the Crown for the purposes of the Housing Act, 1919. ⁶ A survey of the grounds just prior to this sale recorded a tennis lawn at the front of the house edged with a band of ornamental trees. A large expanse of garden was noted on the east and two “old sheds” were screened from this garden by a high macrocarpa hedge. Nearer the house, on the western side there were a number of sheds, possibly an old carriage shed or stables and to the rear of the property there was a substantial orchard. At the south-eastern boundary between Avebury and the neighbouring property a high brick wall (extant) was noted.

In 1948 the house and approximately 8 acres was passed to the Mayor, Councillors and Citizen's of Christchurch for “the health, amusement and instruction of the public, with formal transfer occurring in 1951. ⁷ Plans had already been formulated for the development of the grounds two years earlier by Edgar Taylor⁸ however as these are currently misplaced it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the work undertaken other than the planting of additional trees and shrubs and the formation and planting of a frontage on to Evelyn Couzins Avenue. ⁹

Four years later Morris Barnett, in his 1954 paper 'History of Parks, Gardens and Reserves under the control of the Christchurch City Council' described the grounds as having been developed into “a Picnic Park with spacious lawns and shrub borders.”¹⁰ The house at this time was used by the district plunket society and was occupied by gardeners responsible for maintaining the grounds.

In the 1960s Council decided to demolish Avebury House and retain the grounds as a suburban park. The Youth Hostel Association persuaded Council to allow them to lease the buildings and grounds and this arrangement continued until 1999. For much of this time the property was known as the Cora Wilding Youth Hostel. (Refer figure 9.) Photographs of the grounds prior to 1965 show that a significant pairing back of planting in the shrubberies and ornamental gardens had occurred since the 1920s. Three of the extant *Tracycarpus* can be seen as mature specimens near the house on its eastern side and the Walnut to the rear of the brick stables is of impressive proportions. (Refer figures 6-8.) The 1880s hedges had been removed and the back of the property was largely given over to play equipment, including an 11m x 7m paddling pool added in 1954 and designed by Edgar Taylor.¹¹ (Refer figure 8.)

5 Press 10 August 1930

6 CT492/280

7 Memorandum of Transfer 492/280, dated 18 July 1951

8 Flesher's Reserve (Avebury Park) A1 plan, Ink on linen, Reference DSU:L198 dated 25 June 1946

9 Reserves Department Report month ending 30/10/1950, CH335 Box 33/4, CCCA

10 CH377 Box 46, No 12, History of Parks, Gardens and Reserves under the control of the Christchurch City Council, CCCA

11 DSU:L1988 dated 30 September 1952



Figure 6. View of the grounds in ca. 1962. Tank stand and brick wall are visible behind the house
Source: Barry and Lesley Brown photograph



Figure 7. View of the grounds looking to the east in ca.1962
Source: Barry and Lesley Brown photograph



Figure 8. View of the grounds at the rear of the house ca.1964. Edgar Taylor's paddling pool far right
Source: Barry and Lesley Brown photograph



Figure 9. View of the entrance to the grounds in 1972 when the property operated as the Cora Wilding Youth Hostel
Source: Canterbury Heritage

At some point in the mid 1970s to 1980s the gardens either side of the main building entrance were replanted and the extant lemon, fejoa, camellia cultivar were added, changing what had been an historically low-growing ornamental display around the front of the house. Other changes highlighted by a Property survey¹² and a grounds plan¹³ show the addition of trees a number of *Prunus billardiera* 'Nigra' on the west side of the carriage drive border. These were also used as infill in the main border on the east of the tennis lawn. (Refer appendix 2.) Fuschia and rose borders to the rear of the house are also noted.



Figure 10. View of the grounds in 1998
Source: CCC Photographs: Avebury House

In 1997 the Youth Hostel Association lease expired and despite calls to demolish the building Avebury House was conserved in 2000 for use as a community facility with a broad based Arts Culture focus. In September of 2002 it was officially reopened by the Prime Minister, Helen Clark. No evidence of any ceremonial tree planting associated with this occasion has been located.

Grounds work undertaken since this time has focused on developing a Victorian-era landscape to complement the buildings (house and brick stables). While the late twentieth century spatial organisation of beds, paths and functional areas has been retained planting in the garden beds draws on nineteenth century species and plant associations.

12 *Property Report of Avebury Park* prepared by Bede Nottingham, undated

13 Undated but believed to have been draughted in the 1980s




Figure 11. View of the house and plantings bordering the main entrance, 2010
Source: P 1090860, L. Beaumont, May 2010






Figure 12. View of the planting to the east of the house in 2010 showing *Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Autumn Glory' ca. 1920s *Trachycarpus*, ca. 1970s lemon and more recent plantings of roses and brugmansia etc
Source: P 1090877, L. Beaumont, May 2010


4. Significant fabric and elements


This section briefly documents the various elements and site fabric of heritage significance as determined from the historical investigation of the Park through time and site assessment undertaken. Note: a full vegetation review was outside of the scope of this project.


Fabric	Memorial fabric	
Location plan reference: N/A		
<p>1992 Plaque associated with Totara planted by Cora Wilding. Wilding was instrumental in introducing the concept of Youth Hostelling into New Zealand.</p> <p>Founders Society seat 2007.</p> <p>2007 White flowering dogwood planted as a memorial to Barry Gilbert, a local resident.</p>		
Refs:	Site visit	Source: P1090863. L. Beaumont, May 2010

Fabric	Constructed fabric - gates	
Location plan reference: N/A		
<p>The Carriage Drive and Pedestrian Gates date from at least 1915 - as seen in photographs of Hubert Flesher, but are likely to be earlier. Posts either side have been replaced but are of a similar style to that seen in the 1915 photograph. The gates are an authentic and important historic element and help to illustrate / position the grounds of "Avebury" as the setting of a moderately wealthy family.</p>		
Refs:	Site visit	Source: P1090858. L. Beaumont, May 2010

Fabric	Constructed fabric -wall	
Location plan reference: N/A		
<p>The wall appears on survey plans in 1945 but its style of construction suggests that it may have been built earlier than this. (Further research is needed to determine the construction date.)</p> <p>There is evidence of joint cracking and failure along much of its length.</p> <p>(Access was restricted to parts of this in May.)</p>		
		
Refs:	P1090913. May 2010	Source: P1090900. L. Beaumont, May 2010

Fabric	Above ground archaeology	
Location plan reference: N/A		
<p>Evidence of an earlier building which was incorporated into the Flesher's 1885 house can be seen at the southern end of the house in the form of steps and foundations.</p>		
Refs:	Site visit	Source: P1090883. L. Beaumont, May 2010

Fabric	Planted fabric – drive etc	
Location plan reference: N/A		
<p>The remnant Carriage Drive is a strong landscape element and significant feature which, although not part of the Park is still visually, historically and experientially associated with the grounds and can be said to define the curtilage of the property on its northern aspect.</p>		
Refs:	Site visit	Source: P1090847. L. Beaumont, May 2010

Fabric	Planted fabric- trees	
Location plan reference: N/A		
<p>Mature tree cover across the Park continues to reference the early spatial organisation of the grounds and reflects the division of functional spaces. The form of the carriage drive through the tennis lawn can be gauged by the Camperdown Elm and the <i>Acer negundo</i> and the <i>Tracycarpus fortunei</i> indicate pathway systems to and around the house. The collection of mature trees lying beyond the gate reference the boundary between what was the domestic landscape and the farmed paddocks. Of particular interest is the large Walnut to the rear of the stable, the Osage orange on the southwest boundary and the significant <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> on the west of the park. In addition, 3 trees on the eastern boundary have been identified by Council staff as dating to 1926 and 1 to 1931. Only 3 native species are noted.</p>		
Refs:	Tree mapping survey sheets	Source: P1090925. L. Beaumont, May 2010

5. Heritage values

Historical and Social Significance

Avebury Park is significant for its association with the prominent Flesher family who were actively involved in Christchurch public life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. William, James and Hubert played prominent roles in the Methodist Church and James served on numerous municipal and local boards and was Mayor of Christchurch in the 1920s. Hubert was a well-known Christchurch Barrister and Solicitor.

The grounds are part of a wider historical narrative of the early development of the Avonside and Richmond areas. The first evidence of their development can be traced to between 1851 and 1858 when Dr Gundry erected a cottage on the property.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s the garden was used for the Free Methodists' Circuit garden parties and other fund raising events connected with the church. The property as whole was associated with the Youth Hostel Association for a thirty five year period and has also been the home of the East Christchurch Racing Pigeon Club (now known as the Richmond Working Mens Club Pigeon Club) since the 1960s. More recently the Park has been the scene of Summer in the Suburbs Picnic in the Park events.

The 1948 transfer of the house and grounds to the Mayor, Councillors and Citizens of Christchurch for "the health, amusement and instruction of the public is of historical and social significance in that it reflects a phase in town planning when there was a determined move to provide adequate recreational opportunities for inner city and suburban dwellers.

Cultural and Spiritual Significance

In addition to the Avebury residence and stables, the above ground archaeology, brick wall and Carriage and Pedestrian gates and somewhat vernacular tree collection are all important historic fabric which continue to reference the Park's past as the residence of a moderately wealthy family.

The Park also has a commemorative value by virtue of the commemorative plaque and totara which recognise the association of the Youth Hostel Association and the property's past life as the Cora Wilding Youth Hostel.

Architectural, Landscape and Aesthetic Significance

There is still a clarity of landscape character observable in aspects of the Park which continue to reference its nineteenth century landscape design. This includes;

- spatial organisation of the carriage drive, stable and the carriage turn between the stable and the residence
- early plantings of Lime, Oak Acers etc
- form of the garden beds directly in front of the house
- visual screen which prevents views from the tennis lawn to the rear of the Park

Other later periods of planting have contributed to the aesthetic quality of the grounds and, from the late 1990s, the grounds have been sympathetically refurbished using many plants and trees that reinforce the residential history of the grounds.

The aesthetic value of the Park also relates to the historic carriage drive plantings and the cumulative size of the grounds and the relief of the Park's footprint in the built up area of Avonside.

Archaeological Significance

Foundations of an earlier cottage are present in the rear of the site and as a landscape of pre-1900 human activity the site has archaeological significance and potential, particularly in the root zone areas of the earliest trees.

Group and Setting Significance

The Park is one of a small number of neighbourhood parks which were originally designed as private gardens and continue to reflect aspects of their residential history.

Landmark Significance

The planted grounds and impressive carriage drive of "Averbury" have been a significant visual presence in Avonside since the 1860s. The acquisition of the property in the late 1940s and its twenty-first century use as a public park continues this.

Technological, Scientific and Craftsmanship Significance

The gates and brick wall demonstrate period approaches to the construction of and fashion in boundary treatments.

As an early residential landscape with remnant plantings from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century Averbury contains a significant arboricultural record and evidence of plant availability.

6. Bibliography

6.1 Books, Reports and Research Papers

Cylopaedia of New Zealand. Vol 2. Canterbury, 1903

Hendry, J. A. & Mair, A. J. (1975) *More Homes of the Pioneers and other Buildings*, Caxton Press, Christchurch

Pratt, M. A. (1934) *The Story of the South Island Methodist Orphanage and Childrens Home*, Christchurch, Bascands, Christchurch

Richmond Methodist 1969 Centennial Pamphlet

Scotter, W. H. (ed) (1965) *A History of Canterbury*. Whitcombe & Tombs, Christchurch

6.2 Periodicals and Newspapers

'Council split over call to pull down 115-year-old house' *Press*, 13 November 1999

Star, 4 March 1895

Weekly Press, 27 November 1901

Press, 14/9/1948

Press, 26/7/1969

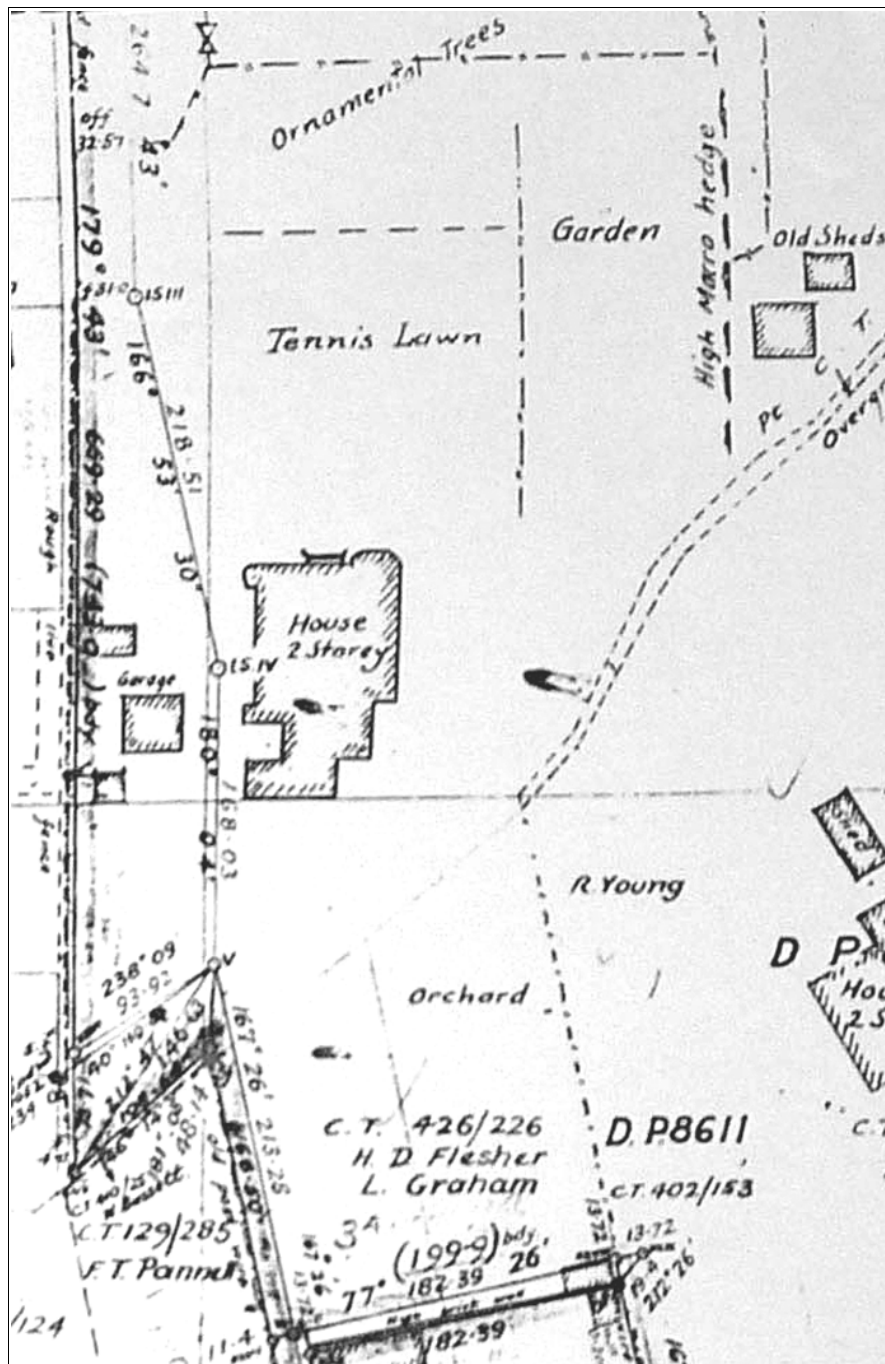
Star, 31 December 1881

Star, 31 December 1883

Press, 10 August 1930

Archive Records

CH377 Box 46, No 12, History of Parks, Gardens and Reserves under the control of the Christchurch City Council, CCCA



Appendix 7.1. Detail from 1943 Survey plan showing grounds layout and boundary treatments
Source: CT492/280 LINZ

